In consequence in the Middle Ages the conceptions of Jew and trader became well-nigh synonyms, and it came to be thought abnormal for Jews to take up other professions. They became prisoners in their own stronghold, and could no longer abandon the occupations which they had chosen, even had they wished to do so. They were forbidden to buy land and engage in agriculture., and, when a class arose of Christian merchants and artisans, the Jews were gradually debarred by law even from various branches of these professions. This produced in the later Middle Ages the economic misery and abasement of the Jews, from which, only at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they slowly began to find their way back to other occupations.

None the less, commerce has everywhere remained their most important occupation; historically connected with it, they had less reason to leave it when, with the rise of capitalism, a powerful development set in in commerce, offering rich possibilities of gain.

They abandoned it only where overcrowding deprived them of a chance to make a living, or where other professions offered a better income or higher social rank. As mentioned above, the slow economic development of Eastern Europe failed to provide in commerce for their growing numbers. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they

turned to cognate occupations, and farmed taxes, excise, and dues from the State, or the monopoly of producing and selling vodka from the nobles. They were less inclined to engage in handicrafts, which were not so profitable as commerce, and were considered as inferior socially; but, if forced to do so, they chose handicrafts linked up with commerce, and thus came to engage primarily in the finishing trades; they became millers, dyers, tailors, furriers, tanners, goldsmiths, diamond-cutters, opticians, etc. With some of these handicrafts Jews were familiar even in the earlier Middle Ages, as they were required for the preservation of their goods or for adjusting them for their customers, and